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Scottish Bird News

No 86 Dec. 2007

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# The Birds of Scotland

***The SOC is very pleased to announce the publication of* The Birds of Scotland.**

It is the most significant publication that the Club has ever produced. Covering 509 species in 1,664 pages over two volumes, it is truly a monumental work. One hundred and fifty-seven authors were co-ordinated by a team of nine editors – a mammoth logistical task over five and a half years. The volumes also contain 905 photographs from 213 photographers, with each species beautifully captured. The publication, in keeping so closely to the original timescale, is a huge credit to the whole editorial team: Ian Andrews, Ron Forrester, David Clugston, David Grundy, David Jardine, Bob McGowan, Chris McInerny, Ray Murray, Mike Betts, Mike Pennington and Bernie Zonfrillo.

The Club owes a huge gratitude to all of them for their vision, determination and dedication to complete this project.

***Chris Waltho***
*President*

*Lead editors Ian Andrews (left) and Ron Forrester*

*The 'mock up' copies* *Ian Andrews*

**The early days**

The seeds for a new *Birds of Scotland* were planted as early as 2000, but they were to be a couple of years in germination. Several ideas were circulating at this time. SBRC were considering an expanded *Scottish List* as a follow-on to work it was finalising on a Scottish sub-species list and a paper on endemic subspecies; and the SOC Editorial Committee had proposed a regional avifauna series (see *SBN* for March 2001). The idea was that the latter would culminate in a new *Birds of Scotland* sometime in the future. Proposals evolved and it was thought that the SBRC's *Status of Birds in Scotland*, as it was then called, could kick start the avifaunas series with an annotated list to include a paragraph or two on the status of each species. Soon it became apparent that what was required was something more extensive, and so *The Birds of Scotland* project was conceived.

A team was put in place, building on the SBRC sub-group that had been meeting regularly for some time. It met formally for the first time at Glasgow University in June 2002; the six original members being Ian Andrews, Dave Clugston, Ron Forrester, Bob McGowan, Ray Murray and Bernie Zonfrillo. Initially the idea was that this team would write the book, but it became clear that in order to produce the best possible account of Scotland's birds it would make sense to invite people to write the text for those species about which they had specialist knowledge. The original team became editors, although all retained varying degrees of writing responsibility.

By the summer of 2003, templates had been issued for the 509 species and first drafts were starting to arrive from 157 different authors.

The enlarged team were producing something considerably superior to what the original six-man team would have written; however with so many authors, there was a great deal of editorial work required in order to ensure that the species texts would be produced in a uniform manner and not as 509 unrelated essays. Dave Clugston soon realised that the workload for editors was rapidly becoming considerably greater than originally envisaged and with reluctance left the editorial team, although remaining an author. By this time Mike Betts and David Grundy had been recruited to the editorial team, and Chris McInerny was brought in to replace Dave. As the project continued to mushroom in size, Mike Pennington served a term on the editorial team and David Jardine also joined.

And so the project had transformed from an embryonic idea to a work in progress. The momentum established ensured we were well beyond the point of no return, although a great deal of work still remained ahead.

***Ron Forrester***

SHOUT
SHARE

*Stuart Rivers at NMS with the Scottish 'firsts' specimens* *Harry Scott*

**The Historical Perspective**

Today, with access to the internet and the availability of an extensive broad range of modern literature, it is fairly straightforward to obtain up-to-date information and news on ornithological issues. However, for those interested in events deeper in history, it can be much more difficult and time-consuming to source original accounts. 'Deep history', for some, simply pre-dates August 1958, when the first issue of *Scottish Birds* appeared. For others though, sourcing original accounts in literature from 100-150 years ago is important, either as a component of research or for general interest.

A substantial amount of information on early Scottish ornithology is embedded in journals such as *The Scottish Naturalist/ Annals of Scottish Natural History* and *The Zoologist* and in books such as Harvie-Brown's *Vertebrate Fauna* series (in particular) and Gray's *History of the Birds of the West of Scotland*. Although Baxter & Rintoul gleaned from these and other sources for many noteworthy records for *The Birds of Scotland*, this was by no means a fully comprehensive process and the references to original literature remained somewhat patchy.

One aim of BS3 was to extract this historical detail from older published sources, with particular attention to first records and other important records, with full references stated. A corollary to this was that information would be given for important historical specimens where these had been collected. These data would include the museum/institutional (usually) name and accession number. Unsurprisingly, the bulk of these specimens were incorporated into the national collections in Edinburgh, first as the Royal Scottish Museum, then as the National Museums of Scotland. It gave the editors considerable satisfaction to track down a few specimens of Scottish 'firsts' that were extant in other museum collections. It was also considered important to record the fact that some important specimens were no longer extant.

One example of this enhanced detail in *BS3*, drawn from original accounts, is the similar circumstances surrounding the first three occurrences of Pectoral Sandpiper. All were female birds, and all were shot on snipe bogs – with one, procured during a snow-storm, mistaken for a Jack Snipe. The second specimen still exists in Ipswich Museum.

It may be stressed that without the deposition of many of these specimens in permanent zoological collections, the vast majority are unlikely to have survived; this would have been a significant loss to Scotland's ornithological heritage. Wherever possible, *BS3* has drawn attention to their continued existence. This feature and a more fully referenced 'deep history' provide an accessible route to Scotland's ornithological record.

***Bob McGowan***

**Species accounts**

The bird accounts, describing the 509 species on the *Scottish List*, and forming the main part of *BS3*, were written by 157 invited authors. The large number of both professional and amateur ornithologists in Scotland with specialist knowledge about particular species enabled comprehensive and expert coverage of the entire *Scottish List*.

The size of each species account in *BS3* depends on the status on the bird species within Scotland. Resident or summer breeders command more sections and words than winter visitors or vagrants. But in every case a standardised format ensures a similar approach to content. Each account begins with a header containing a summary of the species status in Scotland, followed by a brief outline of its world range and taxonomic status. This is in turn followed by sections describing Scottish range, distribution and status, breeding cycle, population and trends, and finishing with gaps in current knowledge. For vagrants more abbreviated sections and fewer words are used. In all cases great emphasis is placed on the status on the species within Scotland, with the author putting this status within a global context. *BS3* also endeavours to make population estimates for all breeding and wintering birds, based on the most recent available data; and where significant trends in populations are known, these are outlined.

Of particular note in *BS3* is the emphasis placed on describing both endemic Scottish species and subspecies. In many cases subspecies endemic to Scotland are very little studied with, in consequence, their conservation status incompletely known. *BS3* describes current knowledge, but also outlines significant gaps in understanding, with the hope that this will encourage further research.

During the research for the species accounts, many new or "lost" pieces of fascinating information about birds in Scotland were either discovered or rediscovered, which we are pleased will now be known to a wide audience. Two examples of these include exceptionally rare breeding records of Long-tailed Skua and Montagu's Harrier. The only proven occasion that a pair of Long-tailed Skuas have nested in Scotland occurred at Barry Buddon (Angus & Dundee) during the summer of 1980, and for many years this fact was kept secret; indeed the nesting was thought to be a myth by many local birdwatchers. Through a complicated paper trail we were able to locate a wonderful painting by Colin Gibson now in the Barry Buddon Army Camp Officers' Mess showing the breeding pair, and confirm that nesting did indeed occur. A similar chain of events resulted in locating a colour photograph by David Stephen of a male brooding Montagu's Harrier at Braco Moor (Upper Forth) published in a 1953 edition of the *Scottish Field*, and also reproduced in *BS3*.

*BS3* has attempted to create the most comprehensive, up-to-date and interesting accounts of bird species found in Scotland. We thank the authors for all their huge efforts and we hope that readers will enjoy the fruits of these labours. Happy reading!

***Chris McInerny***

*Continued on page 5*

*Scottish Bird News*
No 86 Dec. 2007

Edited by
Jimmy Maxwell
Ian Francis

Assisted by
Jean Torrance
Wendy Hicks

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Contributions for the next issue of *SBN* should be submitted not later than 7th February 2008 to:

***SBN* Editor, SOC, The Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre, Waterston House, Aberlady, East Lothian EH32 0PY.**

Articles can be sent on disc or by e-mail (mail@the-soc.org.uk), although we do still accept typed or handwritten material.

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# NEWS & NOTICES

## New SOC Members

**Ayrshire** Mr D L. K. Brown, Mr D Jagodowski, Mr J Morrow, Mr & Mrs J W Wright, **Borders** Mr & Mrs B Prater **Caithness** Mr I Outlaw, **Central Scotland** Mr R Cameron, Mr T Corcoran, Ms H Cunningham, Mr A Everingham, Mr R W Foster, Dr H A Rolton, **Clyde** Mrs A B Anderson, Mr K Hoey, Mr G Linstead, Clare McGhee, Mr A McHugh, Prof K Nicholson, RPS Group, Mr & Mrs P Wotton, Ms C Wylie, Mr B Wyper, **Dumfries** Mr A M Cook, **England, Wales & NI** Mrs S Blamire, Mr A Boorman, Mr A Condon, Mr D Cramp, Mr S Elliott, Mr N Fowler, Mr B Gates, Mr N Hudson, Mr P Hutchinson, Mr R W Jarvis, Mr P Kent, Ms W MacAlpine & Mr J Cockerill, Mr & Mrs I Norris, Mr T Ota, Mr G C Pollinger, Mr A R Reedman, Mr M Rimmell, Miss A Schofield, Miss E Smith, Mr I T Sutherland, Mr L J Taswell, Mr M Vickers, Mr & Mrs J Wales, Prof & Mrs J F Woodward, **Fife** Mr I C Evans, Mrs L Gibson, Mr G A Harper, Mr A Kidd, Mr T Short, Mr J Telfer, **Grampian** Mr C Gordon, Mr C M Norris, **Highland** Margaret Ackers, Col & Mrs P D N Baird, Mr I Cameron, Mr A Drever, Mr & Mrs R Evans, Mr R Henderson, Mr P W E Knott, Mr T Pendle, Mrs C Walker, **Lothian** Mr K S J Allinson, Ms J Bytheway, Ms L Coventry, C M Doig, Mr I Ebbage, Lord & Lady Emslie, L Farrer & G Harkes, Mr & Mrs F Forster, Mr E Henderson, Mrs A S King, Mr K Knapp, Mr N A Macaulay, Jean Manson, Ms A Marland, Ms P Z Masters, Ms C McHardy, Dr & Mrs M Moir, A Nutter & D Stonehill, Gillian & David O'Brien, Jenny Phillips, Peter and Samantha Ranscombe, Katherine Russell, Mrs S Sievwright, Mr D Singh, Mr F M Skinner, Mr W Sleigh, Elisa Smith, Mr C Stone, Mr R Sutherland, Dr A S Wight, **Orkney** Ms J Campbell, **Overseas** Mr Y Shigeta, Mr H Vardhan, **Scotland - no branch** Mr P Boyer, **Stewartry** Mr & Mrs P Tarling, **Tayside** Mr S R Green, Mr J Low.

## 200 Club

The latest prizewinners are – **September: 1st** £30 Mrs H.Merrie, **2nd** £20 B.Pirie, **3rd** £10 A.Anderson **October: 1st** £30 A.J.Sprott, **2nd** £20 D.McIver, **3rd** £10 C.K.Mylne. **November: 1st** £150 Miss J.Williams, **2nd** £75 M.Nicoll, **3rd** £50 Mrs K.Miller, **4th** £30 R.L.Gardner, **5th** £20 J.Ballantyne, **6th** £10 Dr J.Stewart

200 Club funds have allowed us recently to purchase two new armchairs for the Gallery and also a new Laptop PC for use in the Library and elsewhere.

New members are always welcome. They must be over 18 and Club members. Please contact – Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH.

## SOC stand at Rutland

The photo below shows our SOC stand at the International Bird Fair at Rutland Water last August. Those representing the SOC there were Wendy Hicks, Mike Betts, Ray Murray, Edmund Fellowes, Ian Andrews and his son Stephen. There was lots of interest in the forthcoming *BS3*, with 50 copies ordered and more orders promised - and 14 new SOC members were signed up.

*Meeting the public* *Ray Murray*

## The Waterston Library

The Waterston Library at the SOC's headquarters at Aberlady began as the personal library of George Waterston, one of the co-founders of the SOC and whose name is perpetuated in the names of both the library and the headquarters building. It is part of the Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre and is available to all *bona-fide* researchers and interested birdwatchers, whether Club members or not.

The Lending Library present in the SOC's former HQ at Regent Terrace in Edinburgh no longer exists. Without exception, therefore, there is no facility for borrowing material, and the lending library has been sold to obtain funds for the Club. To consult material, individuals must therefore visit the library in person. It is open seven days per week as per the HQ opening hours.

The main functions of the library are to maintain:

**1:** a Library of Scottish Ornithology, aiming to be as far as possible a complete repository of all material on Scottish ornithology.

**2:** a Library of non-Scottish Ornithology, which includes:

- standard works on most up-to-date English, Welsh and Irish avifaunas, on a selective basis.
- standard works on avifauna of all parts of the world.
- handbooks on identification, distribution and breeding biology of complete bird families.
- standard works on bird behaviour, survey methodology, etc.
- monographs on resident and visiting species to Britain from the Palearctic and Nearctic (monographs on other species not to be specifically sought).
- complete runs of all the main British journals, as well as local English regional and county journals of particular interest.
- complete runs of all the main journals for each country worldwide.

**3:** Archives, which embrace the papers of prominent Scottish ornithologists and include manuscript material of Scottish ornithological interest, as well as records of SOC and other Scottish ornithological institutions. There are also photographic and sound archives.

At present the archives are not accessible, as the SOC currently has no archivist to catalogue the collection.

Other facilities provided by the library include a limited photocopying service (small amounts only), a selection of recent journals for browsing before their addition to the library, and a considerable collection of duplicate books, journals and papers for sale. The latter has accrued considerable funds for the Club and further donations of surplus material are always welcome. Some donations have contained material not held in the Waterston Library and have therefore provided valuable additional material. Another valuable source of material originates from the many books received for review. These are added to the shelves once reviewed in *Scottish Bird News*. The library committee is always seeking reviewers, so if you are able to help in this respect, please contact the Librarian. Regional bird reports should also be deposited with the library and editors of these (including ringing reports) should be aware of the library's requirement to maintain complete runs of such material and the most up-to-date issues.

*Sliding book sections in use* *Jean Torrance*

The Waterston Library at present holds runs of approximately 200 journals and in excess of 4500 books. It is the foremost ornithological library in Scotland and one of the best in the UK. Catalogues of both journals and books can be found on the SOC's website and are updated from time to time. There are strict rules on the movement of items within the library, with cards and instructions available. These are designed to maintain the order in which items are stacked and to minimize the need for SOC staff to supervise library users. Usage of the library has increased since Waterston House was opened. Recent users have included members and non-members alike, including students and professionals. Recent subjects researched have included the St Kilda Wren, Namibian birds, Hen Harriers, Weather-related behaviour, a plethora of subjects for the forthcoming *'Birds of Scotland'* and birdwatching sites in Portugal.

To learn more about the library's holdings, visit the SOC website at www.the-soc.org.uk.

***Norman Elkins** on behalf of the Waterston Library Committee.*

## Letter of Appreciation

Relatives called in to Waterston House on their way north to visit Dr Maeve Rusk, to enable them to tell her about the building and the Library as she had donated all her many Natural History books to us. Her relatives were full of praise for the exhibition and the building, and took a photograph of the library for Dr Rusk, who is over 90 and in retirement at Inverness. Dr Rusk had been an eye specialist in the Highlands and Islands, therefore travelled widely in the area, also Pakistan and South Africa - but her love in life was the birds of the Islands.

## SOC member honoured

We were delighted to hear that Dr. Alastair Lavery, Head of Education for RSPB Scotland, and former SOC Council member, has been awarded an MBE for his services to environmental education and to arachnology. Many congratulations.

## Dumfries and Galloway Report

The No17 bird report for 2002 – 05 is now available at £7.50 (incl. P&P) from Duncan Irving, 12, Great Eastern Ave., Glencaple, Dumfriesshire DG1 4QZ.

## Notice

We are very sad to announce the recent death of SOC member Russell Young who served as Secretary to the SOC Council for many years. An obituary will appear in *Scottish Birds* in due course.

## *The Birds of Scotland*

*continued from page 2*

**BS3 - Organisation**

After 36 years in the Army, I really should have remembered that old adage 'Never volunteer!' But when the opportunity arose to join the editorial team, just after retiring from a second career, I flung caution to the wind and volunteered to help, primarily on the administrative side. Five years older now, considerably greyer, but probably not a lot wiser, I can look back on a period of intense activity, endless hours at the computer screen, a lot of new (often e-mail!) friends, and a great deal of satisfaction.

The book involved almost full-time work, leading me to advise the younger members 'Never retire!' It started with a request from the more knowledgeable members of the team to contact potential species authors, and thereafter to be the point of contact: thank you, all 157 of you, for your patience and politeness as my increasingly frantic requests for drafts reached fever level! Of course this way of working, with so many authors widely dispersed throughout Scotland and further afield (Stuart Rae holds the record for the furthest away, in Australia!), would not have been possible without e-mails, and goodness knows how many have been used over the five and a half years of the project. Ian, being a methodical sort of guy, did keep a personal record, which totalled around 25,000, and a very rough estimate would perhaps come to close on a quarter of a million for the book – but it could be many more!

*BS3 mock-ups next to BWP Concise* *Ian Andrews*

As the writing and editing drew towards its close, so the advertising, publicity and sales began to take prominence. We printed 75,000 flyers which were widely distributed in various ornithological magazines, we gave 41 publicity talks to a variety of audiences, and we ran a highly successful pre-publication offer, which by its conclusion had resulted in over 1,500 sales. We timed this to close after the Bird Fair at Rutland, and Ian, Ray and I went down on behalf of the team, ably assisted by Edmund Fellowes (who deserves an outstanding testimonial as a salesman!) and Wendy Hicks. Ian's son, Steven, also helped with the lugging of boxes, including through the quagmires as we packed up. We sold 49 copies in those three days, but achieved much more publicity too for the book and the Club. Of course all these sales had to be entered onto a special database at Waterston House, and once again we were indebted to the staff and volunteers who have put in so much time and effort with this mammoth task.

But that's not the end, and we are currently planning the actual sorting and distribution of the books when they arrive in Edinburgh – ten groups are collecting, 800 copies are to be posted, and 280 will need to be moved to Aberlady. This time the work will be very physical – each book weighs 8 kg – and once again we shall be relying heavily on volunteers throughout the Club to make it all happen smoothly. Thank you all for such wonderful support.

**Sponsorship**

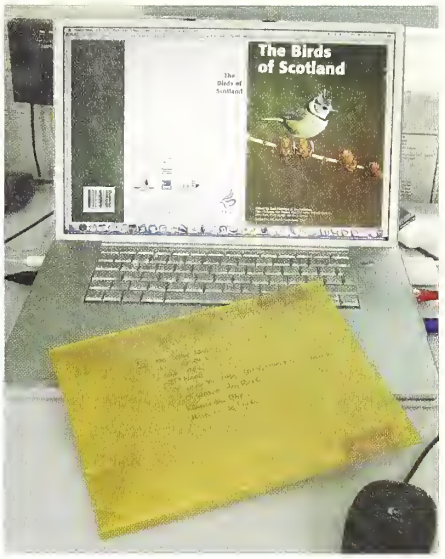
Our aim all along was to make the book readily affordable to as many readers as possible. It has thus been essential to keep the price down, and for this we are indebted to our sponsors. We are particularly grateful to Chris Spray at SEPA who provided the first substantial donation, which helped us to demonstrate to others that the book was worth supporting. Thereafter we have had magnificent support from SNH, who have been our mainstay, and we have also received generous grants from Forestry Commission Scotland, RSPB, Curracag (the Outer Hebrides Natural History Society), the Gilman Trust, the Edinburgh and Glasgow Natural History Societies, and from Mr Robin Menzies. Whilst we were unsuccessful with commercial sponsorship, the generosity of the above has made it possible, we believe, to present this magnificent book at a remarkably low price, and we are truly grateful to our sponsors

***Mike Betts***

**BS3 - the Final Stages**

With SOC acting as publisher, the team were always aware that this would involve more work than if we had gone to an established firm – but with so much voluntary effort, it also meant that SOC would keep a larger cut of the income. Advances in technology also meant that this was achievable.

We were on a steep learning curve as the various stages of the process became apparent. Which printer to use, how many copies to print, what paper to use, should we have digital proofs or 'wet' proofs, what are ozalids, what colour H/T band did we




*BS3 artwork disk ready for courier* *Harry Scott*

want, cardboard thickness for the carton, ISBN numbers? The list seemed endless.

Having sent out electronic versions of the proofs to authors in March 2007, late changes to the technical content were kept to a minimum, but no matter how many times you read or look at something, you still find 'errors' .. and there will doubtless still be some to find! Also, some parts had to wait until the last minute, including the page layouts, photographs and artwork.

Harry Scott couriered the DVDs containing all the files to Hong Kong on 29 August. The wait to see if they could read everything seemed endless and Harry was about to go on holiday. They couldn't! Some font files were emailed back! Phew, another milestone reached. On 21 September, the digital proofs arrived in a 21kg box with 1,672 high-quality A4 photographic prints – even to eye-ball each page for a mere 15 seconds it would take seven hours to go through the two volumes! We had five days to do it. After three people had done their best, we had another 50 corrections to make – and two had actually found the same missing full

*21kg of BS3 printers' proofs* *Harry Scott*

*BS3 on the Chinese printing presses* *Terry Lee*

stop! Not bad out of a total word count of just short of one million.

This was the first time we had seen the whole book, including photographs, in a printed form, and any concerns as to whether we had achieved our aims were quickly dismissed.

Back in early 2002 we had set ourselves the goal of publishing *BS3* in November 2007. Having heard of so many similar projects falling months, if not years, behind schedule, we knew we had a tough job on our hands. Working back, we made educated guesses as to how long each stage would take and believe it or not as I write this in late October, the book is printed and our shipment is due to arrive in Edinburgh on 14th December. Only two weeks behind schedule after 5 years!

The next problem is what you do with 28 tonnes of books on 50 pallets – perhaps it should have been an annotated checklist after all!

***Ian J. Andrews***

**Photographs**

It is perhaps a cliché to say that photographs enliven the text, but with an encyclopaedic work such as this, there was certainly a need to include some images. Having made the decision to include at least one photograph of each species, and for each photograph to have been taken in Scotland, the search was on. We set a budget for scanning slides and, in 2002, we envisaged most photos would be in that format, but as the years progressed, the transfer from film to digital photography took off. The advantages of digital images soon became evident, both in terms of quality and ease of use. In the end, about 3/4 of the images were digital and taken in 2002 or later.

Harry Scott took on the search for photos of the rare and scarce species, whilst Ian Andrews did the same for the commoner ones. These presented different challenges, and whilst a database of the majority of rarity images could be attempted, photographers had to be relied on to submit their best photos of the commoner species. Requests were published in all relevant journals, and websites were scoured. In view of the vast influx of stunning new images, it was decided to include images from after the end-2004 data cut-off, and the latest images were taken in July 2007, at the same time as the final image choices were being made. The SOC now holds an indexed archive of some two thousand images. Those looking to use any of these should contact HQ (who will direct the enquiry to the photographer) or the photographer direct.

Only one species known to have been photographed in Scotland is not illustrated by a photo – that is Nighthawk. The photograph proved more elusive than the bird itself, but it may turn up one day. This and other non-photographed species have been illustrated by Tommy Daniels.

**References**

The *BS3* reference list is something of a *magnum opus* in its own right, with a complete listing of over 5,800 references. It is anticipated that a digital copy of this document will be made available on the SOC website in early 2008. Species-by-species reference lists will also be available.

*BS3 on the Chinese printing presses* *Terry Lee*

*Ian Andrews with the first copy* *Dave Allan*

# SOC Conference

*Duke of Gordon Hotel* *Jimmy Maxwell*

Once again, the SOC Conference on 2-4 November, was based at the Duke of Gordon Hotel, Kingussie. Those attending on the Friday evening were treated to an excellent opening talk:

**Scotland's Geography and Habitats**

*Stuart Benn*

Stuart took us on a personal tour of places he has known at some period of his life. Boyhood in urban Glasgow: in the mix of gardens, streams, small woodlands and parks it was possible to get started in ornithology. Gradually the horizon extended to Campsie Glen with larger woods and a wilder stream, then to the farmland and moors around Eaglesham. While at Secondary School waterbirds at Lochwinnoch were followed by Cathkin Braes with chats and warblers.

Adulthood allowed a national view, starting with the Argyll oakwoods, home of the glorious Redstart; estuaries and firths with waterbirds and waders, Tay reed beds now with Marsh Harrier and Bearded Tit; Strathspey and the Insh Marshes – Goldeneye expansion with the aid of nest boxes; native pinewoods with Crossbill, Crested Tit and Capercaillie. Out to the Western Isles – waders, Twite and Corn Bunting. Inner Hebrides – Islay, important for geese and Chough. Foula (Shetland) for Shag, Black Guillemot and Fulmar. Flow Country, home of Greenshank. Grouse moors with Merlin, Peregrine and Hen Harrier, Ring Ouzel and Black Grouse. Mountain tops with Dotterel and Snow Bunting. St Kilda, Bass Rock, Rockall and the Sea itself for amazing numbers of seabirds. Where else could you find such a range of habitats and birds in so small a country? The photographs were superb and we hope many of them will be in *BS3*!

***Graham Pyatt***

The traditional Quiz followed in the downstairs bar, this year devised and conducted by Ian Andrews, predictably based on *BS3*. Dates, statistics and historical facts were therefore the fare, and the winning team with Edmund Fellowes did very well to finish with 20+ out of the 28 points. Ian deserves our thanks for his efforts and in providing a bit of relaxing fun.

Sat. morning was arranged by Scottish Bird Atlas Organiser, Bob Swann. Delegates were encouraged to get out to the area west of Newtonmore to survey a few tetrads and get a taste of the Atlasing fieldwork programme which started this month. All enjoyed this wee outing into the beautiful autumn colours and most achieved some interesting sightings.

*Surveying near Bonavie* *JM*

After lunch, the Conference proper got started with Janet Crummy welcoming everyone and explaining the pre-occupation this year with the production and content of *Birds of Scotland* (*BS3*) – a truly superb effort by all involved. All the lectures would be concentrating on the contents of this book.

**Changes to Scotland's avifauna**

*Ray Murray (his summary)*

The new *Birds of Scotland* came about after a series of decisions about the Scottish List made by the Scottish Birds Records Committee in 2000 and 2001. A discussion about the need to do a re-write of Valerie Thom's book was made at the 2001 SOC conference in Newtonmore and it was resolved to make an attempt. Once some additional help was found for what proved to be an increasingly large task, writers were found for all of the species by 2003. One of the outcomes of the book is an assessment of just how many birds inhabit Scotland. In the breeding season the population was found to be between 15-24 million pairs of birds, while in winter there was estimated to be something in the range of 35-45 million birds. The most numerous bird, winter or summer, is the Wren, with about 1.4-1.8 million pairs in summer and 5.5-8 million birds in winter. It was also the rarest, the Fair Isle Wren have a population of just 25-30 pairs, which for a short period in 1981 was reduced to just 10 pairs. *BS3* has also been responsible for several new population assessments, including that of Nuthatch (260 in 2004), Willow Tit (300-1,000 pairs) and most interestingly Water Rail, where the 1,250-1,400 territories total dwarfed the previous assessment of 88-175 pairs.

*Ray Murray* *JM*

**Osprey**

*Roy Dennis*

Arguably, the group of species most changed in status since *The Birds of Scotland* 2 by Valerie Thom are the Raptors, and of these the most dramatic recovery story is the Osprey (Pandion Haliaetus) written up in *BS3* by Roy Dennis. His name has been synonymous with all raptor development, virtually growing up from Project Osprey with the Master, George Waterston. Since those testing days of Species Protection and Publicity, Roy has worked on the cutting

*Roy Dennis* *JM*

edge of research using the technology of radio-tagging and satellite telemetry. Indeed he illustrated to Conference how accurately the hourly signals from West Africa pinpoint Scottish birds on their winter feeding grounds, expressing concern at the commercial fishing there. The Scottish Ospreys are breeding well with 200 pairs active, but with space for 500 pairs in Scotland, there is much research still to be done. Roy suggested that the Editors of *BS3* ought to consider putting it on line in due course to allow its expansion as new data becomes available.

***Duncan Watt***

**European Honey-buzzard**

*Brian Etheridge (his summary)*

The European Honey-buzzard is a breeding summer visitor across central and northern Scotland and a scarce spring and autumn passage migrant, mainly to the east coast. Historically, it was considered a sporadic breeder and rare migrant but since the 1970s a small population has become established, with annual breeding recorded.

This population reached 15 pairs in Highland by the early 1990s and breeding was noted in Perth & Kinross and in Dumfries & Galloway at the same time. Breeding adults return from central African wintering grounds during the second half of May and nest- building and egg- laying commence soon after. Nest woods can be either plantation forest or mixed mature woodland, featuring open glades and rides. Most breeding attempts are successful (93%), the young thriving on a diet of wasp grubs supplemented during wet weather with frogs and nestlings of woodland birds.

*Neville Crowther with Brian Etheridge* *JM*

Many young have been ringed but there has been only one recovery – a chick shot in late winter in the Guinea Republic. More recently, data from satellite tracking has provided an insight on migration timing and the route south to wintering grounds.

The species is probably overlooked as a breeding species in Scotland and may be more widespread, maybe reaching 50 pairs.

After the 200 Club draw with Vicky McLellan thanking Daphne Peirse-Duncombe for all her hard work, coffee was served. Members had a choice of visiting the SOC shop, Subbuteo, Second Nature and SOC 2nd hand books, the Viking Optics corner or viewing the fine display of bird photos by Eric McCabe. The lectures resumed...

*Heddie Merrie buying an Eric McCabe photo* *JM*

**Chough and Wood Pigeon**

*Clive McKay (his summary)*

Writing the accounts for these two species presented very different challenges. The status and distribution of the Chough is well known, with national surveys of the Scottish population in 1980, 1986, 1998 and 2002 (all published in *Scottish Birds*). The species' ecology and population dynamics have also been the subject of research projects over the last 20 years. Hence the main difficulty writing the account was in synthesising all this information without leaving anything important out.

By contrast, although the Wood Pigeon is familiar to us all, and has a Scottish population some 5,000 times larger than the Chough's, it is poorly documented in the literature. There has been virtually no research on Wood Pigeons in Scotland, and population size could only be estimated based on results from small sample sizes of BBSs and from censuses in far away Cambridgeshire by Murton *et al.* Hence little confidence could be attached to the estimated size of the breeding population (488,000-600,000 prs) or wintering population (1.5–1.8 million birds). One intriguing question concerns the observations of birds migrating in large numbers in November at coastal sites on the east coast – such as the 20,000 flying >SW inland of St Abbs (Borders) in one morning on 22 Nov 2001 by David Graham. There is no evidence to suggest that these could have been Scandinavian birds, but more observations on the species' migration in Scotland are required.

*Clive McKay chatting* *JM*

The author is grateful to the *BS3* editors for the opportunity to write about these two fascinating species, and would like to acknowledge the help and expertise provided by Ian Andrews in producing the excellent graphics which accompany the accounts.

At the SOC's 71st AGM, Janet presented the Annual Report and Dick Vernon talked the audience through the Annual Accounts. Chris Waltho was duly elected as our new President and David Jardine as Vice-President, while the new member on Council was Norman Elkins. Keith Macgregor was appointed a well-deserved Honorary Member and the decision was made to retain our current Auditors. The two constitutional proposals regarding Equal Opportunities were both passed unanimously. A little ceremony followed where Janet Crummy was presented with a bouquet as retiring SOC President after she had taken the opportunity to congratulate the *BS3* production team on their success and expressed the Club's gratitude for all their efforts over the years in the form of a bottle of whisky each.

The evening started with a drinks reception and launch of the new Scottish Bird Atlas Programme. The participating bodies were represented by Jacqui Kaye for BTO, Scotland, Chris Waltho for SOC

*Jacqui Kaye with Chris Waltho and Bob Swann* *JM*

and Bob Swann as national Organiser. The next four years of collaboration and hard work was warmly toasted by everyone there.

Later, as delegates gathered in the main hallway for the Annual Conference Dinner, we were delighted by a generous display of paintings by Duncan Watt, all devoted to his famous Hen Harrier theme. Dinner was served in a comfortable, spacious room of gigantic oil paintings. Pat Monaghan delivered this year's speech – a whimsical, gender-ridden offering where the avian/human comparisons kept the audience laughing. Roy Dennis followed with praise for the SOC, especially referring to the forthcoming *BS3* success. He expressed serious thoughts though on our generally aging membership and recalled his own youthful days of passionate ornithological striving and learning. How will our present day youth be motivated? Perhaps our copies of *BS3* can be used somehow to kindle interest and study in young minds?

*Janet with new President, Chris* *Carol James*

Afterwards the bar was the centre for chatting and relaxation with the modest dance floor reasonably patronised this year, mainly due to the local accordionist - this able one-man-band was ideal for the Scots Country dancing and was certainly a solution worth repeating.

Sunday started briskly with the lectures again benefiting from the excellent audio/visual skills of Stephen Hunter. He managed to keep all the electrical pieces of equipment running smoothly without any obvious distracting moments and deserves all praise for this tricky task.

*Mike Harris* *JM*

### Atlantic Puffin and Common Guillemot

*Mike Harris (his summary)*

As a result of three total surveys of the seabird colonies of Britain and Ireland between 1969 and 2002, the status of Scotland's seabirds is well known. The numbers of Puffins increased by about 25% over the period to a current estimate of 0.5 million occupied burrows. The change however has not been uniform; most colonies have changed little, whereas the east coast population increased from 2,000 to 75,000 burrows over 30-35 years, and continues to increase. During the winter, most native Puffins leave Scottish waters, a few Norwegian birds move in and the total population is guessed at 20,000 birds. The population of Guillemots doubled over the same period, with 1.2 million birds (equivalent to 780,000 pairs) being counted in 2002 and the largest increases again in southeast Scotland. By the end of last century, the rate of increase had slowed down and some colonies, notably those on Flannan Isles, North Rona, Shiant Isles and Copinsay, had declined substantially. More recently, declines have become more widespread. Roughly 750,000 Guillemots winter in Scottish waters. In the 1970s and 1980s, breeding Guillemots returned to colonies during the late autumn and winter whereas recently, the return has become later – a further suggestion that conditions for these birds are becoming less favourable. The main threats to auks, in an order of how we might mitigate against them, are mammal predators reaching island colonies, oiling, over-fishing of sandeels and other small fish, and climate change.

### Arctic and Great Skuas

*Bob Furness (his summary)*

This is a time of dramatic changes in the fortunes of Arctic Skuas and Great Skuas (bonxies) in Scotland. After several decades of population growth, Arctic Skua breeding numbers are now decreasing very rapidly in most parts of Scotland, especially in Argyll and in the northern isles, which have traditionally held the largest colonies. They depend on other seabirds to catch fish that they can then steal. Breeding success of many seabirds has been severely reduced by the collapse of sandeel stocks in Shetland and in the northern North Sea, and Arctic Skuas have failed to raise any chicks in Shetland in most recent years as a result of food shortage. Experiments in which we provided the species with extra food demonstrated that better food supplies allowed them to keep chicks alive up to fledging, to work less hard searching for feeding opportunities, and to improve survival of the adults given extra food. So it is clear that sandeel scarcity is the main problem for Arctic Skuas in the northern isles. Why numbers are declining in Argyll is less clear, though these small colonies are at the southern extreme of the species'

*Bob Furness with Chris* *JM*

breeding range. Bonxies are also a threat to Arctic Skuas, displacing territorial pairs, and killing many of their fledglings when breeding is successful. Bonxie numbers had been increasing in Scotland for many decades, and Scotland holds over half of the entire northern hemisphere population of this species - so the Bonxie has an outstanding claim to be our most Scottish of birds! But their numbers are now falling at many colonies, especially large ones. With reductions in sandeel stocks, and reductions in trawl fishery discards, Bonxies have been forced to switch increasingly to killing other seabirds as food. They are having unsustainable impacts on several species, especially on Kittiwakes in Shetland, but also on Storm-petrels, Eiders, and locally on many other species, which may represent a major conservation issue in the next few years.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull and Herring Gull**

*Pat Monaghan (her summary)*

The most common species occurring in Scotland in the Herring Gull group are the western Lesser Black-back *Larus fuscus graellsii*, and the western Herring Gull *L. argentatus argenteus*. The Lesser Black-back is a common breeding species in Scotland. Though still largely migratory, numbers overwintering are increasing, especially in central Scotland. Lessers breed throughout much of Scotland, mainly in coastal areas, but also inland. While it has declined in the north east, the overall breeding population has continued to rise since the first seabird census in 1969-70. The total breeding population in Scotland now stands at over 25,000 pairs, of which 14% nest inland, and 18% in urban areas. In marked contrast, the breeding population of the Herring Gull has more than halved over the same period, dropping to just over 72,000, less than 1% of which are inland, and 8% in urban colonies. The causes underlying the surprisingly different population trends of the two species are unclear. Their diet and ecology are broadly similar, both essentially being birds of the inshore coastal area, and both having undergone dramatic population increases in the first half of twentieth century. The decline of the Herring Gull, which is becoming notably scare in some areas, signals a major change in coastal ecosystems, and detailed studies of the two species are needed.

*Pat Monaghan* *JM*

*Book browsing* *JM*

After coffee, the last three speakers continued . . .

**Grey and Golden Plovers and Dotterel**

*Des Thompson (his summary)*

Let us consider some of the global flyways used by waterbirds of the world and the extraordinary journeys made by many of these birds. Scotland has played a key part in unravelling the nature of these flyways and there is a massive international effort into understanding and protecting these routes and their birds. It is an incredible fact that something like 4.2 million waders travel south through Scotland each year from Greenland and Iceland.

Scotland currently has around 2,800 wintering Grey Plovers, and a further 10,000 birds on passage. Their numbers in winter have increased since the 1970s, but from the 1990s have begun to decline. One of the reasons given for the decline is that with climate warming, some birds may now travel south more directly, and so Scotland misses out on them. These birds are fascinating to watch on their wintering grounds, with some being territorial (more likely to be males) and others in loose flocks (more likely to be females and juveniles). They are especially territorial in early winter, and will defend territories day and night.

With Golden Plovers, reflecting on my work with Ingvar Byrkjedal, we find extraordinarily variable plumage types across northern Europe. We should think of the montane and moorland/peatland populations as having quite different ecologies and behavioural habits, not least in terms of their use made of pasture fields whilst egg-laying and incubating. Again the flyway maps reveal the importance of Scotland's birds and research in terms of our understanding of these, at times, inconspicuous gems of birds. As with Grey Plovers, there have been declines in winter numbers, which may also be related to an eastward shift in distribution. More work is needed on trends in the breeding season, and it has been noted that numbers observed on some traditionally used fields have declined.

In recent research on the polyandrous Dotterel, it has been found that as many as eighty percent of female birds in Scotland may put males on eggs, and then fly on to Fennoscaninavia to put more males on eggs. Understandably, one will not be optimistic about the prospects for this bird in the face of climate change, which is all the more concerning given the high densities and productivity of Dotterel on some of our hills.

*Des Thompson with Ron Summers* *JM*

**Purple Sandpiper**

*Ron Summers (his summary)*

The Purple Sandpiper can be regarded as a Scottish species in the British context, with over 90% of the winter population occurring in Scotland. Scotland also has all of the tiny breeding population. In the last 30 years, Scottish ornithologists have made big strides in our understanding of the complexity of Purple Sandpiper migrations, primarily through ringing, but also through biometric (bill and wing length) studies. Large geographical differences in the size of birds from different populations means that one can match measurements taken on the breeding grounds with those on wintering grounds. This two-pronged approach has meant that we have established that about a quarter of our wintering population, and the breeding population originates from Norway. The remaining wintering birds do not breed in Iceland, but many pass through there in spring, and the biometric evidence indicates that they are heading for Canada, though there has not been a ringing recovery to confirm this. Recent ringing recoveries have also shown that some wintering birds come from Svalbard, but the number of birds involved is relatively small. The recent decline in the number of our wintering birds is of some concern, but may be a return to low numbers after an increase in the 1970s.

*Ken Shaw* *JM*

**Vagrants, Migrants and Potential Breeders**

*Ken Shaw (his summary)*

Mediterranean Gull is a potential breeder in Scotland. The first accepted record in Scotland was on 1st October 1972 at Girdleness, N E Scotland. Since then occurrence has become regular, particularly over the past 15 years. Med.gulls are found throughout the year, although mid-summer is the quietest time. Four recording areas dominate the records; Ayrshire, N E Scotland, Lothian and Fife. The species has been found in breeding colonies of both Black Headed and Common Gulls, and with birds breeding in Northern England, a breeding record from Scotland is expected soon.

The first Greenish Warbler in Scotland was on 12 September 1945. It is now a regular early autumn migrant in some years. There are few spring records - only 11% of the total, but at one time it was considered a potential colonist. This could still happen, as Greenish Warbler is still colonising new countries - particularly in central Europe.

Many ornithologists are interested in changing the known status of species on a county or national basis. The quickest way to do this is to find a national first! Scotland's first Masked Shrike was at Kilrenny, Fife from 29th October to 14th November 2004 and was a much predicted addition to the Scottish list. It was followed in Shetland two years later by Olive Tree Warbler, which comes from the same part of the world. What next? Grey-necked Bunting is a real possibility for the next two decades with recent records in Western Europe. Few species have changed their status in Scotland as dramatically as Yellow-billed Diver in recent years. As recently as five years ago it was considered a vagrant, but intensive work by Martin Scott, Ken Shaw and others have shown it to be a passage migrant - particularly in April, through N W Scotland. A paper on this remarkable change in status is due to be published in *British Birds* early next year.

Unlike the other species we have discussed, the Great Grey Shrike as declined sharply as a winter visitor over the last few decades. The best counties to encounter this species in winter are Highland and N E Scotland. However, in recent times this charismatic species is more seen on passage.

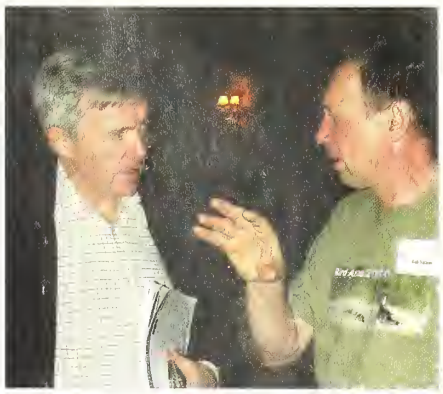
***The Birds of Scotland***

*Ron Forrester*

As senior editor of *BS3*, Ron gave the final talk, being an update and overview of the text. This was a very confident and optimistic presentation brimful of facts, figures and statistics. Bear in mind however that Ron was not placed in a normal traditional pre-publication role which usually remains hidden from the public then is followed by a much trumpeted launch, book signings, and a rather nervous wait for the verdict of the "critics".

The very gratifying uptake on the concessionary offer shows both a genuine desire to own this very comprehensive reference book and an appreciation by the membership of the vast amount of work undertaken by the *BS3* team.The result has been a dramatic rise in the fortunes of the club and much praise should be accorded to those responsible.

Future SOC projects were then considered with Bob Swann's leadership of the 2007-11



*Ron Forrester with Bob Swann* *JM*

Bird Atlas which of course is a joint BTO, SOC and Bird Watch Ireland Enterprise. 21 regional volumes were envisaged and an SBRC approved "Avifaunal Series" planned.

Finally predictions of species were considered; surprising exponential growth charts appeared with 1800 being taken as a bench mark, only the Great Auk and Bittern resting on the deficit side. Did no Woodcock grace the plate of a pre-1800 landlord and were all pre-1800 egg collections so impoverished ? Looking back and forward are fraught with risks. One can always trawl the writings of our pre-1800 National Bard for species mentioned! A fitting lecture to end the Conference.

***Campbell McLellan***

*Wendy Hicks* *JM*

After the drawing of the Raffle, realising the amount of £279, our new President, Chris Waltho, summed up the events of the weekend and thanked everyone who had worked so hard in its organisation, especially our cheery and efficient HQ Office Manager Wendy Hicks, and wished all a safe journey home. Everyone headed out into the afternoon sunshine agreeing that this Conference had been especially interesting and a social success. As one loan delegate, attending for the first time, said to me "I never felt alone" – and this after all is the sign of a really good SOC conference.

*My thanks to all who agreed to write up these talks and also to the speakers themselves for this task.*

***Jimmy Maxwell***

# White-tailed Eagles return to eastern Scotland!

*Adult White-tailed Sea Eagle in Norway* *Stein Nilsen*

August saw an historic moment in Scottish ornithology – the reintroduction of White-tailed Eagles to the east of Scotland. In a partnership project between RSPB Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and Forestry Commission Scotland, 15 birds were released from a site in Fife during the early part of the month. The 15 young birds were collected by NOF (Norwegian Ornithological Society) – the BirdLife partner – led by Alv Ottar Folkestad. They were collected on 10th-20th June from central western Norway, around 600 km south of where birds were collected for the original Scottish west coast reintroduction scheme. Birds were only collected from nests containing twins.

The chicks were fitted with BTO rings on collection by the Norwegians. This will allow the compilation of a full history of the chicks, their parents and siblings in Norway. They arrived, aged six to eight weeks, on 22nd June at RAF Kinloss, transported by the Norwegian Air Force. This was witnessed by a large media gathering, but the challenges presented by this were worth it, as it made it easier to get on with rearing the birds afterwards relatively undisturbed. Prior to being placed in aviaries, the young were checked by two vets and blood samples and faecal swabs were taken. The blood samples allowed accurate sexing of the birds and will provide material for analyses of pollution levels and DNA.

During the rearing period, the birds were kept in pairs and trios in aviaries, with an artificial nest made up of bark and moss on a platform, a large perch leading out to the release hatch and stumps, and perches on the ground. The pens are open-mesh fronted to allow the birds to 'learn' the landscape and general area. They were fed through a hatch in the back onto the nest, using a material sleeve or curtain so they could not see people and associate them with food. CCTV, security and motion sensors protect the pens. Each bird received 1 kg of food daily, provided twice per day, and food consisted of fish (whole and off cuts from Arbroath smokies – mackerel and haddock), head-shot rabbits and venison. Fresh fish is important as vitamin B1 (thiamine) breaks down with freezing and thawing.

*Rabbit, venison and fresh fish twice a day* *Andrew Hay RSPB*

The birds were very quiet for the first few weeks, but then began to branch and to flap, regularly exercising their wings. They also had some lively exchanges with a nearby nesting green woodpecker and often called at passing Ospreys and Buzzards. Wing tags and radio transmitters were fitted on the 27th July by Roy Dennis, Duncan Orr-Ewing and Justin Grant. The wing tags are white, fitting into the year colour scheme of the west coast, with single letters or numbers with horizontal bars above and below (black on white). The radio transmitters weigh 70g, or around 1-2% of the adult body weight. Their batteries should last five years, and we aim to monitor where the majority of the birds go and what habitat they utilise – though it is likely that the young birds will wander large distances. All radios also contain a mortality switch – a mercury switch that flips after birds don't move for 6 hours, allowing field workers to be instantly notified of dead/immobile birds. The chicks weighed 3-4.5 kg when they arrived and 4.3 – 5.6 kg five weeks later.

The 9 males and 6 females were released between the 10th and 14th August, with the hatch doors being opened early morning. The birds ignored all the perches we had built them to accommodate their cautious first flights and instead their first flights were all several hundred metres away. One bird landed on a roadside dyke where it stayed all day surprising drivers and cyclists! At the time of writing (two months after release) the birds have exhibited a range of behaviour that mimics their wild-fledged counterparts with six birds remaining very close to the release site and behaving very socially, soaring and roosting together, although taking additional food to that provided, with occasional trips over the Tay. Two males moved north up the coast, the first via Monikie, then Boddin point before reaching Montrose basin 3 weeks after release. Another, the first bird collected for the project, moved up to Stonehaven for two weeks before moving onto Loch of Strathbeg and then heading south of Fraserburgh. The remaining birds are enjoying the area around Fife and Tayside from the Forth coast, Flanders Moss and north of Dundee. They often follow the

*First female (V) released on 10-14th August* *Andrew Hay RSPB*

coast and rivers as they move as well as stopping at small water bodies.

The birds should return to the area near the cages each spring – they are highly philopatric and this is observed in wild populations and previous releases. Radio-tracking also allows the birds to be followed up to the establishment of home ranges at three to four years old. Although the birds will not attain full adult plumage – with the characteristic white tail & pale head – until they are five years old, there have been many records of birds breeding at younger ages, including those from the last release in Wester Ross.

The productive shallow waters of the Tay area should provide an abundance of winter food, both natural and supplemented by the maintenance of a food dump near the release site throughout the winter (mimicking adults dropping off food for first couple of months). This should increase first year survival, which was c.75% in previous Scottish releases, compared to c.90-95% in the wild in Norway. Although pellets are being collected at the food dump, determining what the birds are eating is difficult as the wandering young birds tend to roost in different areas each evening and do not always drop pellets where they roost. The birds have been observed eating Common Gull, a Hare, Pink-footed Goose and a (presumably scavenged) Mute Swan. All birds ceased to use the food dump in the third week of October and the initially more sedentary group of six birds began to disperse through Fife and Tayside.

Why was the east coast chosen? The area presents many different challenges and opportunities compared to the west. In the original project assessment, four candidate east coast sites were evaluated from the viewpoint of food, habitat, possible persecution and the potential for viewing by people. The Tay/Forth area was chosen as it has shallow productive waters, many wintering wildfowl, good year-round food sources and is close to population centres. White-tailed Eagles are birds not just of wild and remote places. In Norway, birds nest less than 500m from ports and towns; if disturbance is constantly in the background, birds can become accustomed to it. However birds do not nest on the protected seabird island of Runde, as thousands of visitors pour in each April/May to see the Puffins and disturb the eagles, nesting attempts each year failing at the laying/egg stage.

The East Scotland Sea Eagle project is planned to last for five years, with 15-20 birds released each year - more than in previous releases. This should help the establishment of breeding pairs as groups of birds become socially cohesive. It is likely that the east may meet wintering west coast birds on Loch Tay, and eagles in the east may attract those from the west and vice versa. In time, we hope a breeding population will become established, both increasing the range and securing the future of Scotland's Sea Eagles – the return of this magnificent bird to the East coast after an absence of 150 years!

Please report any sightings or behavioural observations to:

***Claire Smith**, RSPB Scotland*
*Claire.BSmith@rspb.org.uk*

*Large male (F) first collected for the project in Norway*
*Andrew Hay RSPB*

*A familiar sight in eastern Scotland in the future?* *Stein Nilsen*

# A new Breeding Bird Atlas for North East Scotland: 2002-2006

*Aerial photograph of NN99T (Cairn Toul and Lairig Ghru area) showing how one of the 2,340 tetrads fits into the real world!* *Ian Francis*

After five years of hard work, the new Breeding Bird Atlas for North East Scotland was completed in 2006 – an amazing effort, since this 'tetrad' atlas is the largest of its kind ever undertaken! We would like to thank very much all those who participated in this mammoth project. It just could not have been accomplished without this enormous 'team' effort. This article contains some of the summary facts and figures about the project, as well as some of the almost finalised maps. There will always be further error checking to complete and probably a small number of extra records will be received in the next few months. But as outlined below, we hope that we can commence writing species accounts and beginning the production of the planned book over the coming winter.

**Background to the atlas project**

Over twenty years have passed since fieldwork began for the pioneering '*Birds of North-East Scotland*' Atlas. Published in 1990, the recording period spanned 1981-1984 and breeding evidence for all bird species was located in each of 395 recording units in what is now Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City. This groundbreaking book remains unique in its breadth and depth of coverage of all aspects of the distribution and occurrence of birds in this area.

Many changes have taken place since then in the numbers and distribution of breeding birds. Following discussions between many local ornithologists and representatives of different clubs and organisations, it was decided to attempt a 'new' breeding bird atlas, which began in 2002 and has spanned a five-year period. The new atlas includes Moray (which has never had a breeding bird atlas), and is being run by an informal committee of local birders under the auspices of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club Grampian branch and the Moray Bird Club.

The recording unit is the tetrad – a 2x2km square on the Ordnance Survey grid. This means that, in terms of the number of squares to be visited, the task was enormous – but the detail and amount of information revealed makes this approach well worthwhile.

**Recording breeding birds**

In common with most local Breeding Bird Atlases, our project aimed to find the 'highest' level of breeding activity of every bird species in every tetrad, over the period of the atlas. Records accumulated from year to year, from all sources, so that a 'composite' 5-year picture of the breeding birds in each tetrad was produced. The results from all tetrads were combined to produce the atlas maps. Records came from many origins, from individuals 'adopting' a tetrad and working it intensively to 'casual' sightings of one breeding species by one observer in a square. Specialist surveys and results from individual species studies were also incorporated as far as possible.

Recording cards were provided for detailed working of tetrads and also for noting casual records from anywhere. It was also possible to enter casual or supplementary records via the NE Scotland Breeding Bird Atlas web page, developed with the help of Paul Doyle – see www.nescotlandbirdatlas.org.uk, a page of Paul's '*Wildlife Web*' site. The atlas website also provides information feedback.

**2006 – the fifth and final fieldwork year of the project**

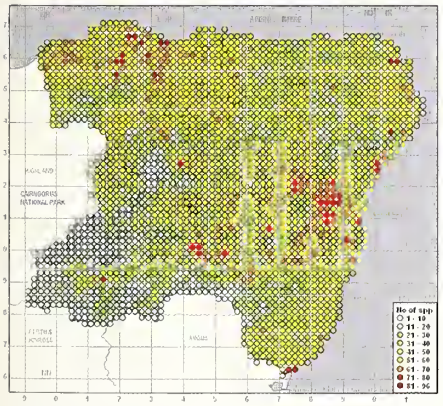
There are 2,340 'tetrads' within Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray. In 2006, coverage was excellent, and during this year, all remaining tetrads were visited, bringing compete coverage – a fantastic achievement! Some key statistics about the work to date are given below, as well as some example maps at the end.

To date, 347 observers have submitted records to the atlas – 275 in Aberdeenshire and 72 in Moray. By the end of the 2006 season (up to mid-2007), around **115,400** records have been received, with records from each of the 2,340 tetrads. This is a phenomenal amount of information! Effort levels increased from 2005, and this ensured that the project was completed. We are very grateful indeed to all who have taken part so far. Of the records submitted to date, around 34% were 'confirmed breeding' 29% 'probable', 33% 'possible breeding' and 4% 'observed'. These figures will change slightly as the dataset is checked for errors, duplications and so on.

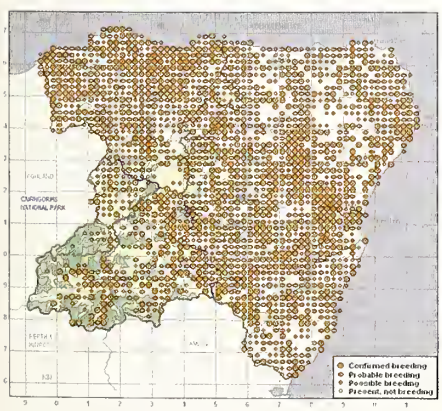
Now we have completed the atlas fieldwork, the distribution maps are really looking good for many species, though some birds have remained relatively under-recorded. There is still distortion due to observer effort for some species, and this must be borne in mind when looking at the maps. Various measures of observer effort will be produced during the data analysis.

A few species maps have been included in this article, and some extra ones will be placed on the website. The maps show different sizes of circle for the three levels of breeding, plus small open circles for 'observed'. The quality in this newsletter is not yet optimised, but the final maps will be produced to a very high standard. The maps were produced using DMAP.

The **first map** shows the number of common breeding species recorded in each tetrad (the rare breeding birds have not been included in this analysis). To some extent it also shows coverage levels, and teasing the two factors apart will be something to which we will pay particular attention in the analysis. The richest (or best covered?) areas are to the north-west of Aberdeen, along the Dee and in northern Morayshire, with obvious areas with fewer species in the uplands but also in the central north-east lowlands.



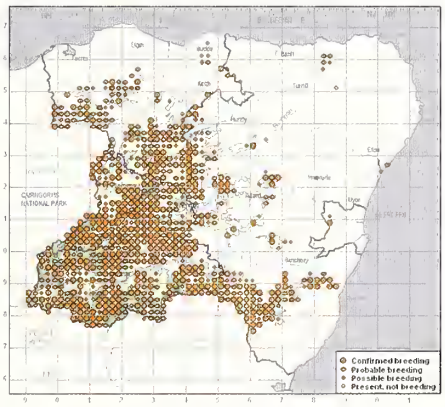
*Coverage levels achieved by the atlas as reflected by number of breeding species per tetrad.*



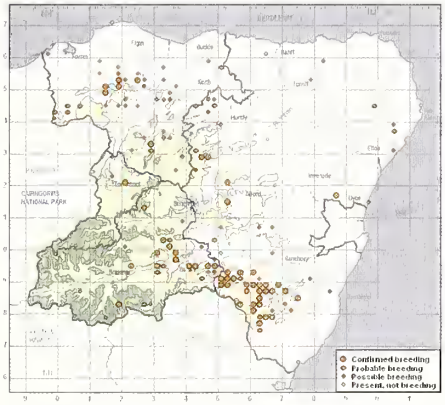
*Breeding distribution of Wren - the most widespread species (1,881 tetrads)*

The most widely recorded species of all is the **Wren** (1,881 tetrads/80% of the total) - the distribution gaps reflect true absence (as in the highest uplands) but also more open habitats in the east, where it may have been overlooked.

The following two maps show two contrasting upland species – the **Red Grouse** (areas shaded are over 300m altitude). This species is very widespread but was not found on several of the lowland peat mosses where it was present until the 1990s. The **Whinchat**, however, appears to be very scarce now and has surely declined. Maps for more species will be placed on the website (address at the end).



*Red Grouse breeding distribution 2002 - 2006*

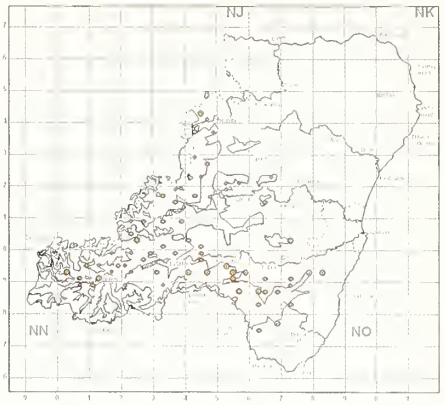


*Whinchat breeding distribution - a declining species*

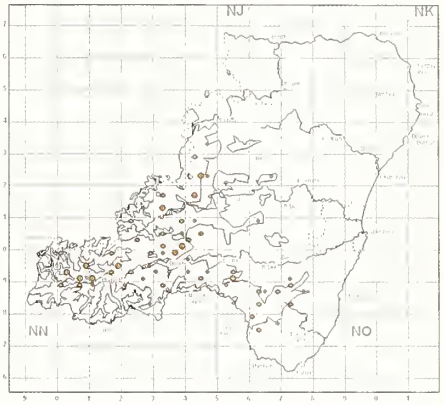
**Comparison with the 1981-84 atlas in Aberdeenshire**

We will be able, for Aberdeenshire, to compare distributions from 1981-84 with 2002-04, using the original mapping units (not tetrads). This analysis is underway and some results will be made available as soon as possible. However, provisional maps for Black Grouse are shown here.

The original book '*Birds of North East Scotland*' by Buckland, Bell and Picozzi (1990) has long been out of print. With the permission of the authors, and thanks to Ian Andrews, we can now offer this book on CD as a pdf file (readable using Abode Acrobat) for £10. If interested, please send a cheque to Ian Francis, payable to 'Scottish Ornithologists' Club'. Proceeds will go towards the publication of our new atlas.




*Black Grouse breeding distribution in 1981-1984*




*Black Grouse distribution in 2002-2006 showing little change; evidence suggests stable or increasing numbers in some parts of the area.*

**What we can offer now**

Until the final atlas is produced, if anyone would like atlas maps for particular species, or would like to use the atlas data in any other way, please contact Ian Francis. We do wish to see the atlas data used as much as possible.

**The end product – publication of the atlas**

We will publish a new breeding bird atlas as soon as possible after the project ends. This book may also have web and CD supplements. Local birdwatchers will write all the species and sections, and we hope to produce an attractive and informative local atlas. More information will be given on this in future newsletters, when we have analysed the results and planned the production in more detail. Our intention is to be nearing completion towards the end of 2008, with a view to publication in 2009.

***Ian Francis** and **Martin Cook**,*
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*www.nescotlandbirdatlas.org.uk*

# The artist at work – Paul Bartlett

*Paul discussing his work with Clyde SOC member Lang Stewart* *Jimmy Maxwell*

Waterston House has now developed as an active centre for birdwatchers to meet, study and socialise. Amongst the varied activities organised there are art exhibitions, some of which involve several artists while others are solo events. One of the latter occurred in September/October this year featuring the young artist Paul Bartlett. Having already seen his work at the Pittenweem Arts Festival this summer, I decided to go along.

I started to walk round the Donald Watson Gallery, studying each painting in the usual way but very soon found that I could view most of the pictures easily from the centre of the room. The subjects seemed at a distance to stand out, rather in the same way as in Impressionist art. In this case though, the reason was not merely the use of paint but the treatment of the actual canvas surfaces. There was something vibrant and compelling about the paintings and I looked forward to discussing this with the artist.

Paul explained that his art had started traditionally with the usual oils and watercolours, but had evolved, partly by accident, into a technique, using acrylics, where the painting surfaces themselves were "attacked". This progressed from scoring, scraping and slashing the canvas to adding materials such as glued paper fragments to allow the surface texture to contribute to the lifelike, 3D quality he wanted. An extra wash was often added to mask unwanted "shine" on the surface.

*Oystercatchers*

"Oystercatchers" with its added colour pieces taken from RSPB "Birds" magazines, illustrates the technique. The paper is often added in a fairly random fashion, but then studied from a distance, changed by adding bits or tearing other bits off and progressed until a more balanced and refined effect is obtained. Some of the orange ground colour has been left as an edging, disguising the birds' outlines, and one has a feeling of "warmth coming through". Like many of these extreme action pictures, the flocking birds were watched and sketched locally, in this case, on Kingsbarns beach.

Paul is a self-taught artist with a PhD in animal behaviour. He won "Artist of the Year" in 2006 with the now well-known collage of flying Golden Plovers. A member of the Society of Wildlife Artists (SWLA), his work has featured in numerous art publications such as International Artist and Wildscape magazine and also in many important exhibitions.

"Shag" was one of the first paintings where Paul began to experiment with "scoring" techniques. This change of approach had much to do with a frustration born of previous preoccupation with detail and a growing need to achieve better spontaneity. Like many of his subjects, the bird was seen on the coast near St. Andrews where he lives with his partner and two young daughters. He tries to capture as much actuality as possible in the field with quick simple sketches – the painting itself starts later in his studio.

"Puffin Pair" also shows the "cutting and slashing" style but here the painting has evolved further into a geometric design where facets of light are caught on the birds' heads and necks. The term "cubist" springs to mind, but I suppose "triangulist" might be more appropriate here.

As we walked round to see more pictures, Paul enthused about his other passion – fish and dolphins. Again it was reflections and the feeling of movement which were impressive. Being a keen kayak adventurer and having a biologist partner whose speciality is seals, one can see how marine life will feature naturally with birds in his work.

*Shag*

I asked what impressed him most when studying the work of other wildlife artists and without hesitation he said - "composition". To illustrate this aspect in his own work, he showed us a personal favourite, "Preen" – a work involving several poses of the same Whooper Swan preening. Here we see a series of elegant, interweaving swan heads – simple shapes, yet contributing to a very pleasing composition in an almost abstract way. This latter tendency perhaps indicates the direction that his future work will take – has he says, "the problem of representing the essence of a species without it actually being on the paper!" We also notice the use of printed fragments which contribute to shading effects in the collage. The print is collected from various conservation magazines and leaflets, showing an

*Preen*

*Puffin pair*

*Preening Swallows*

interesting link between expressing and valuing his wildlife subjects. The title, "Life on the Bass Rock", can only really mean one thing – the Gannets, which have literally taken over that great volcanic rock. Here is the Solan Goose in all its powerful interacting, posturing forms with the printed fragments again giving shade and depth to the forms. This is actually a section taken from of a much larger painting which has been re-worked. Thus, as usual, no landscape setting – straight into the subjects, with only a suggested rocky backdrop of colour tones – a truly arresting composition!

Before I left, I was interested to find a picture of passerines to contrast with the many marine wildlife subjects. Paul's delicate study of roosting hirundines – "Preening Swallows", catches all their varying attitudes as they twist and turn on the bare branch. The "jizz" of each bird depends largely on his original fast sketching and the occasional photograph("even the blurry ones are useful!") which is done in the field – an activity often carried out with his younger daughter on his back. The family are off to the Okavango Delta and Cape Town in November where no doubt there will be plenty new animals and birds to paint. We wish them well and all continuing success to Paul in his career which has produced such interesting and beautiful results so far.

***Jimmy Maxwell***

*Life on Bass Rock*

# Blackcocks sparring through fences at two Border leks

In recent years, Blackcocks (*Tetrao tetrix*) have been observed sparring with each other through sheep fences at 2 leks, 19 miles apart, in Scottish Border country. Both leks are on elevated grassy ridges overlooking glaciated valleys. Lek 1, near the Yarrow Valley, is on slightly sloping ground at 338m altitude. The fence there is composed of standard rectangular sheep mesh with an extra horizontal wire above it (photo 1), and, judging from lichen on the posts, was erected more than 10 years ago. Lek 2, near Moffat Dale, is on flatter and wetter ground at 494m altitude. (This puts it among the highest 4% of leks in Britain, judging from the altitude distribution of sample leks in the 1995-6 national Black Grouse survey (Mark Hancock, RSPB, personal communication)). The fence there has 7 horizontal wires (photo 2), and was erected in 2000. At both leks, grazing stock are present on only one side of the fence.

*Fence at Lek 1* *John Savory*

*Fence at Lek 2* *John Savory*

NM has visited lek 1 regularly on winter and spring mornings for the last 5 years. In each year, he has observed just one Blackcock always displaying, at the same point, next to the fence on the ungrazed (western) side, and another 5-7 cocks always on the grazed side. Of the latter, the cock that is apparently dominant also displays close to the fence, and, between occasional confrontations with other cocks, spends much time challenging the one on

*Evidence in snow at Lek 2* *John Savory*

the ungrazed side. Periodically, these 2 cocks on either side try to attack each other through the spaces in the fence, sometimes pulling feathers from each other. Neither has been observed to cross to the other side of the fence or to achieve significant damage. The fact that a solitary cock has displayed at the same point on the ungrazed side of the fence for the last 5 years suggests that it is the same bird, although it has no distinguishing marks to prove this.

Lek 2 was discovered by JS and colleagues in March 2006, when footprints and wing feather marks in snow (photo 3) indicated that Blackcocks were displaying next to and on both sides of the fence there. This was confirmed on 15 April 2006, when PA observed 5 cocks, 3 on one side of the fence and 2 on the other. Of these, 2 pairs of cocks were seen sparring with each other through the fence. Then, on 26 April 2007, JS again observed 5 cocks present at lek 2, from 0430 until 0730h, 3 with territories on the grazed (western) side and 2 on the ungrazed side. This time 2 cocks consistently challenged each other through the fence, and as the one on the grazed side was the only cock seen to mate a greyhen at the lek that morning, it may have been dominant. Periodically, it lunged at its opponent through the fence (photo 4), and on 3 occasions was heard to hit a wire while doing so. Neither cock crossed the fence or suffered any damage during the confrontations.

The risk of collision mortality that fences pose to flying grouse (of any species) is well known, and a recent SAC Technical Note (TN589, Black Grouse Management on Farmland, March 2007) specifically advised to "avoid erecting fences near lek sites". Yet, despite this, our observations indicate that the erection of a stock fence through a (presumably) long-established lek does not deter Blackcocks from continuing to display there. (In The Birds of the British Isles, Vol XII (1963), David Bannerman cited a lek that had existed for at least 60 years). Moreover, at both leks, 2 cocks (one of which was apparently dominant) confronted each other through the fence itself. No evidence of collision mortality has been found at either lek 1 or 2.

It is, of course, quite possible that there may be no deliberate use of the fence by Blackcocks that happen to have territories next to it. On the other hand, there could be at least 3 ways in which it might be used by one or both of the cocks on each side of it. First, it might be used to define the boundary between their respective territories at the lek. Second, it may be used to provide protection from conflict injury when the cocks confront each other. Third, it may be used to reduce the potential risk of interference by another cock when either is mating with a greyhen. (In his unpublished PhD thesis (Ecology, Dispersion and Arena behaviour of Black Grouse in Glen Dye, NE Scotland, University of Aberdeen, 1969), Gavin Johnstone reported that 43% of 106 observed matings between a Blackcock and greyhen were interfered with by one or more neighbouring cocks).

It would be interesting to know if this unusual Blackcock lekking behaviour is just a localised phenomenon, or whether it also occurs elsewhere.

***John Savory, Neville Morgan and Philip Ashmole***

*Sparring Blackcocks at Lek 2* *John Savory*

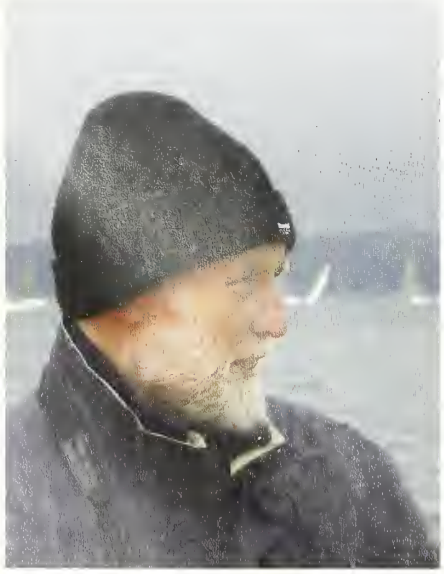
# Clyde pelagic trip in August

*Shearwaters taking off* *David Palmar*

Once again the MoD vessel nosed out from its berth in Greenock and into a Clyde, grey with an enveloping blanket of fine drizzle. As usual, optimism prevailed and expectations were high among the many SOC passengers for a day of wildlife watching and recording – the whole point of these regular trips, as well as promoting the partnership between ornithologists and the police.

Further out into the open estuary, the wind picked up and fierce squally showers were frequent – not the kind of weather for best watching or photography! Perfect however for a massive array of racing yachts which were beating out from the Ayrshire coast - I enjoyed a nostalgic moment studying their manoeuvres, even although our own vessel had to heave to in order to give them space.

Our usual birds were beginning to appear – Black Guillemots (2), Guillemots, Eiders, Sandwich Terns (23 outward), Kittiwakes (35), Manx Shearwaters and 5 Fulmars.



*Watching the race* *David Palmar*

Then, a fantastic weather transformation as brilliant sunshine bathed our return journey down the estuary. Between Toward and Cloch, the Manx Shearwater numbers rose to 1083, many on the water and providing great joy for all the photographers as they panicked off the surface at our approach. My moment of excitement came as I leaned over the prow gazing down absent-mindedly into the bow wave – suddenly I became aware of a huge shape just below the surface, its great bulk and heavy-headed appearance immediately reminding me of Basking Shark. I can only hope that it survived our close passage.

The sunshine stayed with us to light up all the well-known coastal landmarks as we headed home. On the inward trip, 11 Puffins were added and more Razorbills to

*A great view of the "Waverley"* *Jimmy Maxwell*

Further on, off Bute, I glimpsed one of the four Harbour Porpoises during the trip, as it cartwheeled through the surf - a distant Common Dolphin was later seen leaping from the water. As Gannet sightings increased, there were hopes, especially from wildlife photographer David Palmar, that off Lochranza we would see and photograph the birds performing their spectacular dives. Although rain persisted for our landing, the Gannets, albeit at some distance, were observed and their amazing dives caught in the sequential presentation on the page opposite.

Our route back was through the Kyles of Bute and our leader for the day, Bernie Zonfrillo, was among those who enjoyed great views of the "Waverley" steaming along towards Colintraive.

a trip total of five, with also 9 grey and 4 common seals. The SOC members and friends aboard appreciated this free excursion "doon the water" and all praise to the MoD for its enterprising initiative.

*Resting photographers - David Palmar with Lang Stewart* *Jimmy Maxwell*

# Ornithological Folklore 3. The Swallow

Peter Parnall

The Swallow has long been the object of myth, based on false observations. Indeed from the time of Aristotle, because the bird 'disappeared' from its summer haunts, it was thought to hibernate. The great Gilbert White [The Natural history of Selborne] thought so: "many of the swallow kind do not leave us in the winter, but lay themselves up, like insects and bats, in a torpid state, and slumber away the uncomfortable months till the return of the sun and fine weather awakens them". Letter to Daines Barrington, Feb. 12. 1771.

But he was a doubter. In a letter dated 1791 he observes flocks of Swallows "preparing for their emigration". Dr Johnson had no doubts: "Swallows certainly do sleep all the winter. A number of them conglobulate together, flying round and round, and then all in a heap throwing themselves under water, and lie in the bed of a river".

William MacGillivray [*British Birds* 1840, Vol. III P.559.] notes: "As to the torpidity of these bird in winter, their being found in holes, and under water, it is surely time to give up so absurd a notion. It is strange but true that fancies of this sort, such as the breeding of geese from barnacle shells, remain for ages matters of popular belief after the learned, with whom they perhaps originated, have given them up".

The end of summer sees large flocks of Swallows using communal roosts in reed beds. It is not surprising that many people drew the false conclusion that when swallows 'disappeared' they had chosen to stay deep in the reed bed, rather than having begun their journey to eastern and southern South Africa.

Though the Swallow's return in spring is usually welcomed [even though 'one Swallow doth not a summer make'], there is a Scottish tradition that the Swallow has 'a drap o' the de'il's blood in its veins'. This belief notwithstanding, most Scots try to look on the bright side;

*Gang and hear the Gowk [cuckoo] yell'*
*Sit and see the swallow flee,*
*See the foal before its mother's 'ee,*
*It will be a thriving year wi' thee.*

***Michael Thomas***

*Gannet Dive* *David Palmar*

# NOTES & COMMENT

## Caption Competition

Provide a caption for the bird picture below and have a chance of winning an SOC item. Each *SBN* edition will feature a new photo. The winner and other best captions will be shown in *SBN* 87. Send your single caption by E-mail to jimmy.maxwell@virgin.net (or of course by mail to the SOC – see Page 3)

*Red-legged Partridge* *Eric McCabe*

The winning Caption from *SBN* 85 (see photo below) came from David Landsman with – "News of the release of White-tailed Eagles gets around". Well done! Other runner-ups were "PRAWNS, I said, not PRUNES!"- Bob Milne. "Who called me a little squirt?" – David Shepherd.

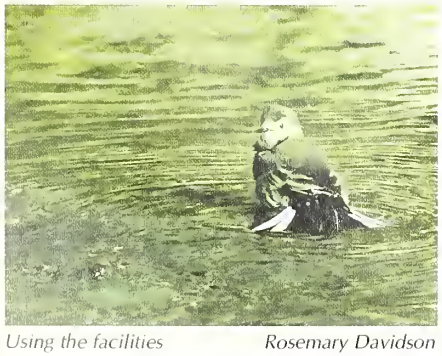
*Cormorant* *Norman Tait*

## Waterston Wagtail washing

*Rosemary is one of our most regular, hard-working volunteers at Waterston House.*

While at Waterston House as a volunteer during my lunch break, I looked out of the Gallery window and there in the shalow part of the waterfall was a Pied Wagtail, one of our regular visitors, doing its ablutions!

***Rosemary Davidson***



*Using the facilities* *Rosemary Davidson*

*Unusual Chaffinch* *Sam Alexander*

## Birds at my garden feeder

Our house in Cults, Aberdeen has an all-year garden feeder. In January 2007, I managed to get quick shots of two unusual visitors. The first was an adult male Chaffinch with a strange white collar. It arrived with several brighter-looking 'continental' type (*F.c.solomkoi*) birds and stayed with them at the feeder for about a week. The other was a Treecreeper which made just two visits, the first time I have seen this. It would be interesting to know if this species has visited other feeders.

***Sam Alexander***

## The one that got away

On October 15th while driving west along the north side of Loch Rannoch, where birches predominate a mile or so beyond Kinloch Rannoch, I was suddenly aware that a bird had flown up from the ground near the woodland edge and was climbing as it crossed the road - I recognised it as a Woodcock. Almost immediately a second brown object emerged from the same spot and I fully expected it to fly too. However, it ran across the road into the vegetation opposite showing its tail as it did so...a Stoat! I could only imagine what it was thinking!

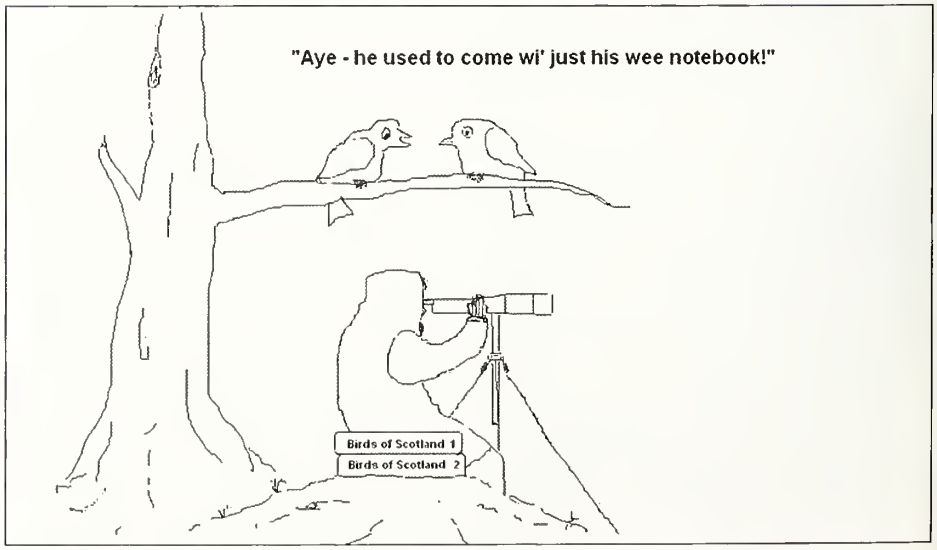
***Ron Youngman***

*Visiting Treecreeper* *Sam Alexander*

## Sea Eagle and Herring Gull

It is always interesting to see wildlife interacting. Frank Stark photographed this Immature Sea Eagle in Lewis having an aerial exchange with a local Herring Gull.

*Sea Eagle and Herring Gull* *Frank Stark*



# BOOK REVIEWS

***Amazing Birds***. A treasury of facts and trivia. Roger Lederer. 2007. A & C Black, London. ISBN13-978-0-7136-866-1 £12.99

To quote the blurb - 'A treasure trove of varied information, this book provides the answer to many puzzling questions about birds' This is a randomly organised collection of fascinating facts and pictures about birds the world over. The illustrations by Stephen Dew are humorous.

It is a "starling's hoard" meant to be dipped into over a leisurely Sunday morning breakfast:- How seed eaters crack open seeds, Do Vultures have a sense of smell? When incubating their eggs, Shags shuffle their warm webbed feet under the clutch before settling onto the nest - (I am not too sure about the accuracy of this piece, he uses the words Shag and Cormorant indiscriminately as if they are one species.)

There is a lot of information here that you did not know you needed to know, and much, much more. It does have a fairly comprehensive index, which in view of the randomness of the layout helped me when I wanted to check the piece about Cormorants. This is a creative way of satisfying those from 6 – 80 driven by curiosity but not wanting a scientific treatise - it would be a good gift for someone just beginning to be interested in birds. A young friend of mine would not put it down until I promised to get him a copy.

***Harriet Trevelyan***

***Flight Identification of European Seabirds*** Anders Blomdahl, Bertil Breife and Niklas Holmstrom 2007. Christopher Helm, London ISBN-13: 9780713686166. 374 pages, 690 col. photos (paperback) £25

This is a cheaper paperback edition of the book originally published in 2003. Written by and for sea-watchers, it covers all species likely to be seen in flight over the sea in Europe - a total of 92 species. Included are all of the classic seabirds (petrels, shearwaters, auks, skuas, etc.) together with divers, grebes, wildfowl, gulls and terns, though phalaropes are omitted. The book is illustrated by 690 excellent colour photographs.

There is a concise introductory section which contains some useful general tips in seawatching and identification, plus a list of sites (Scotland represented by St Abbs and Balranald). The heart of the book follows with the next 243 pages devoted to the species accounts. A flexible approach is adopted with the individual accounts varying in length according to what really needs to be said, ranging from a single page with two photos for Pacific Diver, to five pages with eleven photos for Arctic Skua, also supplemented by family introductions for divers and skuas. This is an excellent format, though it does result in the sections on wildfowl and gulls collectively accounting for about 80% of the main text, simply due to the number of species and range of plumage variations requiring illustration. These species may not always provide the main interest on a seawatch (and distinguishing Heuglin's Gull or American Herring Gull in flight would typically be impossible anyway!) but it is nice to have comprehensive material available for reference.

A significant challenge in supporting practical identification of seabirds is the fact that assistance is most needed for birds viewed distantly, often in adverse conditions, whilst the most useful photos are typically obtained under the opposite circumstances! The book attempts to overcome this difficulty in two ways - by providing many distant views illustrating flock formations, including mixed groups, but most usefully, by describing behavioural details, flight action and aspects of jizz that could be critical to establishing ID of distant birds, for example, how characteristic in-flight head and body movements can be used to differentiate between Tufted Duck or Scaup, or divers. Ultimately it is this distilled expert knowledge and the great experience of the very enthusiastic authors which provides the real value of the book and makes it a truly excellent resource.

***Stephen Welch***

***Manx Bird Atlas*** Atlas of Breeding and Wintering Birds on the Isle of Man. Principal editor: Chris Sharpe 2007. Liverpool University Press. ISBN 978-1-84631-039-3. 389 pages (hardback) £60.

With the first print run already sold out before the official launch date in mid-August, this weighty tome comes highly recommended. Although over 420 'bird atlases' have already been produced for different geographical areas around the world, this is a truly innovative and ground-breaking publication. It is the first ever atlas to incorporate colour density maps, produced with GIS software and using a rigorous quantitative method, which show patterns of abundance at 1km square resolution for all 150 species which breed or winter on the island.

The bulk of the fieldwork was carried out by a dedicated team of professional ornithologists over the period April1998 - March2003, but includes over 400,000 records provided by amateur birders and the public, all now stored on an electronic database at 100m resolution! Front, rear and inside covers show wonderfully evocative colour artwork by Dr. Jeremy Paul and the high quality line drawings which accompany each individual species account are by six different artists, but principally Alan Harris.

With 120 km of spectacular coastline and a highly scenic interior of hills, glens, farmland and wetland, the Isle of Man is just a great place for birds and birdwatchers. The 50+ breeding pairs of Hen Harriers represent a remarkably high proportion of the British population, whilst the 600+ pairs of Black Guillemots and 120+ pairs of Choughs are much appreciated by visitors. All these are thriving on the island at the current time, but the Atlas does identify a number of species in need of conservation. Resident populations of Grey Partridge and Yellowhammer may for example be in near terminal decline, but conservationists on the island now have a highly detailed and quantified source to enable them to target their efforts in the most appropriate direction. And already fieldwork has begun on an updated Manx Bird Atlas to be published after 2015! This book can be reviewed in just one word - FANTASTIC! !

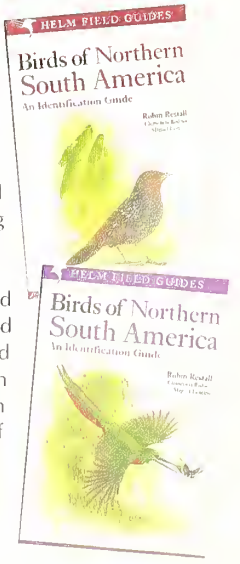
***Ted Abraham***

***Birds of northern South America: an Identification Guide***. Robin Restall, Clemencia Rodner & Miguel Lentino. 2006. Christopher Helm, London. Volume 1: Species Accounts. ISBN 0-7136-7242-0 Softback. £60. Volume 2 : Plates and Maps. ISBN 0-7136-7243-9. Softback. £40, or £85 for both.

Another indispensable double volume in the Helm Field Guide series. They cover all 2,308 species that occur in Ecuador, Columbia, Venezuela, Aruba, Curacao, Bonaire, Trinidad & Tobago, Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana. The introduction states that, " It may also be used ( with caution ) by birders visiting northern Peru and Brazil north of the Amazon".

The species accounts are necessarily concise but include the key identification points, sub-species, habits, status, habitat and voice. A useful shaded paragraph provides a short description to most genera and a few small drawings break up the block of text. It concludes with an extensive discography of northern South American bird voices, glossary and index.

Volume two covers the plates and maps and with 656 pages is a weighty but manageable guide to take into the field. The plates drawn by Robin Restall are excellent although a trifle dark in places and include Peterson-style line pointers to key features. Where this book scores over other Neotropic guides is that nearly 6,400 images on 306 colour plates illustrate every distinct plumage of each species and subspecies currently known.




The coloured distributional maps appear next to each species and whilst very useful, they will inevitably be soon out of date as range extension data from field workers and visiting birders is published.

In conclusion, I would strongly recommend anyone travelling to bird rich northern South America to purchase both volumes, particularly if travelling to several countries in the region.

***David Clugston***

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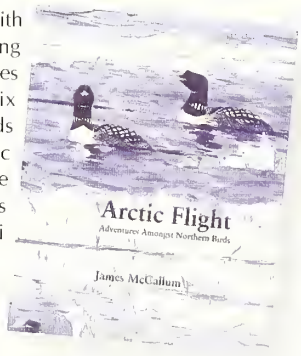
***Arctic Flight - Adventures among Northern Birds*** James McCallum, 2007.Langford Press ISBN 978 1 904078 26 5 Hardback £38.00




This is a diary with sketches, recording visits made by James McCallum over six years to the lands north of the Arctic Circle. The three sections cover his visits to Inari Lapland, Finland, North East Siberia and the Yukon-Kuskokwin Delta area of Alaska.

Each section is introduced by someone living and/or working in the area and involved with birds, leading trips, surveying etc. who, through their intimate knowledge, provide fascinating background information. They also accompanied James McCallum on his field trips.

The entries, both text and sketches, are loosely in diary form, completed at the time in the field, not afterwards in the studio as so often with bird art . This gives an immediacy to his work. Working outside like this north of the Arctic Circle in the 'land of the midnight sun' has its hazards; watercolour paint freezing, attacks by owls, mosquitoes and midges and sleep deprivation; many of the sketches were done around midnight.

Most of the illustration in this book, quick sketches or full-page work, is coloured. Sometimes there is a story in text and pictures; a Hazel Hen balancing precariously high up in the branches goes to roost by plummeting down into the snow, so that only its head is visible, then digs down with its feet until completely buried. His work is lively and impressionistic; Ruffs lekking, flocks wheeling through the skies, teeming flocks of waders - I could almost hear the noise!

***Harriet Trevelyan***

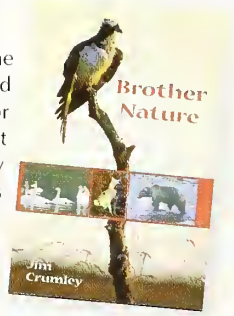
***Brother Nature*** Jim Crumley. 2007. Whittles publishing, Caithness ISBN-10 1-904445-34-9 ISBN 13 978-1-904445-34-0 Hardback £16.99

This book consists of pieces written from his base in Central Perthshire where Highland and Lowland landscapes intermingle. His themes of brotherhood and co-existence weave through this book which is separated into 2 parts:-

Part 1: contains vignettes of his experiences of all wild beings - his brothers: Badgers, Ospreys, Orchids and swans in their wildernesses, and more.

In Part 2: he considers how to re-establish Scotland's natural habitat, especially the species now absent but once common in the Caledonian Forest. The chapter headings bear out the book's title; "Towards a Native Forrest", "Conservation and Cures" etc. One chapter 'Old Simplicities' is autobiographical, charting his movement away from what he calls pack mountaineering, where the social interaction of the people he is with seems to him to prevent full appreciation of the world they are walking through; not seeing details of rock, birds and plants. Over time he evolved into 'a lone wolf' and only then could he really become one with his surroundings. For me, as one who used to carry camp through the West Highlands, this rings true.

He has little time for the established conservation industry and his ideas on how to achieve a better balance of species especially in the degraded highlands of Scotland are thought-provoking. In "2015 a Land Odyssey", he fast-forwards to 2015 when changes in land management have led to the spread of biodiverse native woodland into such places as Rannoch Moor and the Monadhliath, thus making the reintroduction of the beaver and native predators such as wolves possible.




One minus point is that the publisher's detailed information on the author is only on the loose dust jacket which can be easily lost or damaged. There is no information within the book itself. His style is fluent and poetic making this book a joy to read.

***Harriet Trevelyan***

***Images from Birding*** Michael Warren. 2007. Langford Press. ISBN 978 1 904078 24 1 Hardback £38.00

The sub-title 'Observations of an Artist Birder' says it all. Michael Warren is an artist and birder who for over 40 years has been birding, watching, surveying and sketching what he sees. This, the latest of his books, is a collection of his field sketches and studio paintings derived from these sketches. His choice is an eclectic collection of the birds he has seen in the British Isles; resident, migrant and accidental. I was at first puzzled by the lack of a list of birds or index, but once I realised he had used the field guide voous order Divers to Buntings, I found an index unnecessary. In this book he shows his command of a range of styles from loose and impressionistic field sketches to accurate illustrations of the birds. In his finished paintings, the backgrounds are of the former style whereas in his previous book "Shorelines", they were mainly stylised and decorative (1984) Some paintings set the puzzle of 'Find the Bird'; as in the field, I had difficulty seeing the birds in paintings of Jacksnipe (p68) and Nightjar (p101) within their habitats. His pictures and sketches have a wonderful sense of movement; of rushing water, lapping wave, whirling flocks of birds, running waders.This is a worthy successor to his previous volumes and a good addition to the collection of art books in the Waterston House Library.

***Harriet Trevelyan***

# *Scottish Bird News*

*Scottish Bird News* is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published four times a year in March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Editors at the address below no later than five weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) was established by a group of Scottish ornithologists who met together in the rooms of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in Edinburgh on 24th March 1936.

The Club now has 2200 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur birdwatchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all, the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications and an annual conference, and houses the Waterston Library, the most comprehensive library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of branches, which meet in Aberdeen, Ayr, the Borders, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, New Galloway, Orkney, St Andrews, Stirling, Stranraer and Thurso, organise field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the Scottish Birds Records Committee. The latter maintains the 'official' Scottish List on behalf of the Club. The Club supports research and survey work through its Research Grants.

The Club maintains a regularly-updated web site, which not only contains much information about the Club, but is also the key source of information about birds and birdwatching in Scotland. SOC is a registered Scottish charity (no SC 009859).

***www.the-soc.org.uk***

***Passwords to access members' web pages on the new SOC web site:***
***'Little' & 'Gull'***